

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Quarterly

VOLUME XXV No. 4

1995

The Origin of Industrial Nursing



Ada Mayo Stewart (l), first industrial nurse in the United States, with her sisters Florence and Harriet.

About the Author

The editor for this issue is Jean Ross, former managing editor of the *Rutland Historical Society Quarterly*. Jean continues to serve as a member of the Publications Committee.

Acknowledgements

The editor especially appreciates the efforts of Elaine Purdy and Marie Tillberg, librarian of Proctor Free Library, in searching for pictures, confirming dates and copying pertinent materials. Acknowledgement is also made to Dr. Jean Spencer Felton, Clinical Professor of Community and Environmental Medicine, University of California at Irvine CA, for her informative article on "The Genesis of American Occupational Health Nursing."

25 April 1945

The 50th anniversary of the beginning of Industrial Nursing in the United States was observed on April 25, 1945, by the New Jersey State Organization for Public Health Nursing. From the program of that occasion we quote as follows: "50 years ago Industrial Nursing was born at Proctor, Vermont, at the Vermont Marble Works. Miss Ada Stewart — was the first nurse to enter this field. Much credit must be given the management of this company for the vision and humanitarianism they possessed for the inception of this branch of nursing."

This account of the origin of industrial nursing is from a text Miss Stewart was asked to compose and read for the above occasion. Ill health prevented her from attending the celebration.

The Beginning of Industrial Nursing in Vermont

Mrs. Henry J. Markolf
(formerly Ada Mayo Stewart, R.N.)

1945

From facts which the writer has been able to gather, it seems that the middle of the nineteenth century saw the beginning of Industrial Nursing. In small concerns, most employers of labor took a personal interest in the families of their employees, as well as in the workers themselves. Before the growth of modern industry this personal and somewhat paternal care on the part of the employer was quite common.

As time went on and factories grew up, this personal interest became less and less and the old association was lost. Then the employer began to realize that it was a good business proposition as well as more humanitarian, to try to keep his workers in sound health and see to it that they had proper living conditions and suitable recreation. At first the paternalistic care, quite naturally, was overdone and the employee resented too much interest in his personal affairs. Then came mutual benefit societies, which, while they saved the workers' self-respect, led to other troubles in the community. One likes to think that "Mr. Fezziwig" was a more usual type of employer than "Ebenezer Scrooge".

When we stop to think that the use of steam in industry has been known for so short a time, and the use of electricity is even more recent, the development of factories and machinery has taken rapid strides. With the employment of large groups of workers, the need for industrial nurses has made itself apparent to all who have given any thought to the subject. Now, most large business concerns employ one or more graduate nurses as social workers and factories maintain a first aid room. The help and advice of the nurse has become a large factor in serving to stimulate loyalty and make pleasant relations between employer and employee.

Although Vermont is one of the smallest of the states, she has been among the first in education and progress. A State Pathological Laboratory was established in Vermont in 1898, even before many other States had founded state laboratories.

"In the field of nursing, the Vermont Marble Company of Proctor, was probably the first to employ an industrial nurse." This is a statement made by Florence S. Wright in the book "Industrial Nursing", published by MacMillan Company in 1912. This book is still used as a standard text book in Nursing Schools. Several large industrial companies instituted this nursing service at about the same time. Among them was the Plymouth Cordage Company and soon after, the John Wanamaker Store in New York.

"Fifty years ago Proctor was a rambling village of typical workmen's houses, painted a uniform dull color and owned and kept in repair by the company. Early in the history of the town a fine marble church was erected [1891] which was the first Union Church in New England. All

denominations were welcome and a surprisingly harmonious organization was effected. True to New England custom, library, school and church were the first permanent buildings to be put up. There were also cooperative stores at Proctor, West Rutland and Center Rutland which were maintained by the company for the benefit of the employees. Here they could purchase almost anything from drugs to clothing and furniture at near cost prices. Today one would hardly recognize in the modern town, with its fine public buildings and comfortable homes, the progress which has accomplished these changes. It seems as though the people must have absorbed some of the beauty of their natural environment where nature has been so generous. The fascination of the marble itself, with the endless variety of graining and color, even the quarry workers seem to appreciate. The village has become one of the most attractive in the state and now most of the people own their homes and take pride in their community. There have been many changes but the beauty of the 'Sutherland Falls' and the grandeur of the 'Everlasting Hills' are unchanged."¹

In the year 1895, Mr. Fletcher D. Proctor, who afterwards was governor of Vermont, was president of the Vermont Marble Company, which was and still is one of New England's largest industrial plants, and in Rutland County, where its principal mills and quarries are located, has always been commonly



PROCTOR FREE LIBRARY

Proctor Village Square in the 1890s. Looking south (l to r) the Union Church, school house and "Company" houses.

¹Benjamin Williams, Director, Vermont Marble Co.; Member, Board of Managers, Proctor Hospital and Public Health Nursing Services of Proctor and West Rutland in 1945.

known as "The Company". With the welfare of his employees as one of the large interests in his life, Mr. Proctor made every effort to inform himself of means to improve their condition. He was a man of broad outlook. He considered the future growth of the business and the good of the increasing number of workers in the plants. He had a remarkable gift of memory for names. The writer thinks he knew the names of every one of the more than three hundred school children of Proctor village—where they lived and where their fathers worked. Within a week after he was elected Speaker of the Vermont House of Representatives, he could call every member by name. Through Mr. Proctor's influence, the directors of the Vermont Marble Company had several conferences and came to a decision in regard to employing a "district nurse". The directors had also in view the establishment of a general hospital in the community, although their ideas of the requirements were rather vague. In considering this action, they concluded that the Waltham (Mass.) School of Nursing was the type best fitted to furnish a nurse suited to their needs.

The Waltham School was instituted with the object of educating young women for "private" and "district" nursing, and of giving to the City of Waltham a visiting nurse service. The school was the crystalization of a dream of Dr. Alfred Worcester.² For many years it was unique in that it was the only American School to give special training to visiting nursing. Dr. Worcester, Professor at Harvard Medical School, had several interviews with Florence Nightingale, Eva Luckes and other teachers of the art and practice of nursing in England. He also visited Pastor Fleidner's School in Kaiserwert [Germany] before the Waltham School was started. The Waltham School was also unique in being established prior to the opening of the hospital and was, and is, a separate corporation. The Hospital was operated by the "Training School" which, from the point of view of most hospitals seems like "the tail wagging the dog". To the present time, the student nurses of the Waltham School have been sent out to the homes of their patients with a graduate nurse or a senior student to instruct them and supervise their work. Thus the students have learned to do their best with the means at hand—a splendid fitting for future Public Health work. There were no "Public Health" nurses at the time Mr. Proctor's plan for the Vermont Marble Company employees was being considered.

The result of the conferences of the Vermont Marble Company directors was that the Superintendent of Nurses of the Waltham School sent Miss Ada M. Stewart, a graduate of the year before, to look over the field since she had had special training in surgical and dispensary work. In March 1895 she was engaged to work among the employees of the company.

It may be interesting to note that the first graduate nurses to locate in Rutland, Vermont, (Miss Alice Kirsting and Miss Sarah A. Barclay) were both from the Waltham School, as were also the first four matrons of the Proctor Hospital and the first two "district nurses" employed by the Vermont Marble Company.

²Dr. Worcester was a graduate of the Harvard Medical School, class of 1883. He served as president of the school and later as trustee of the State Tuberculosis Sanatorium in Rutland.



Fletcher D. Proctor (1860–1911), President of Vermont Marble Company from 1889 to 1911, pioneered in the field of industrial nursing when he employed Ada Stewart in 1895 to provide health care for his employees. He was Governor of Vermont 1906–1908.

Ada Mayo Stewart (1870–1945)

*A Lady with a Lamp shall stand
In the great history of the land,
A noble type of good
Heroic Womanhood.*

*—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
(Santa Filomena)*



THE MEMORY STONE

The Nature of the marble industry was such that it brought in many people of foreign birth. They were of all classes from the stolid quarrymen to the sculptors. These "carvers" were real artists and mostly of Italian origin. One of these artists modeled a font from his own little daughter who posed for him holding a shell which was the fountain. The native Vermonters were mostly of Puritan stock. Years ago there were Slavs, Irish, Swedes, French, Italians, and many others in Proctor, but now there are no "hyphens" as they are all Americans. They were, of course, handicapped by a meager knowledge of our language, but from the first were much interested, and very appreciative of the help and advice of "The Nurse". They were in fact, very cordial and friendly wherever she went when they learned how helpful she could be. Probably there were exceptions as one "Jennie B." was overheard to remark: "Dot Meeshish Stewart, she tink she do whole poosh."

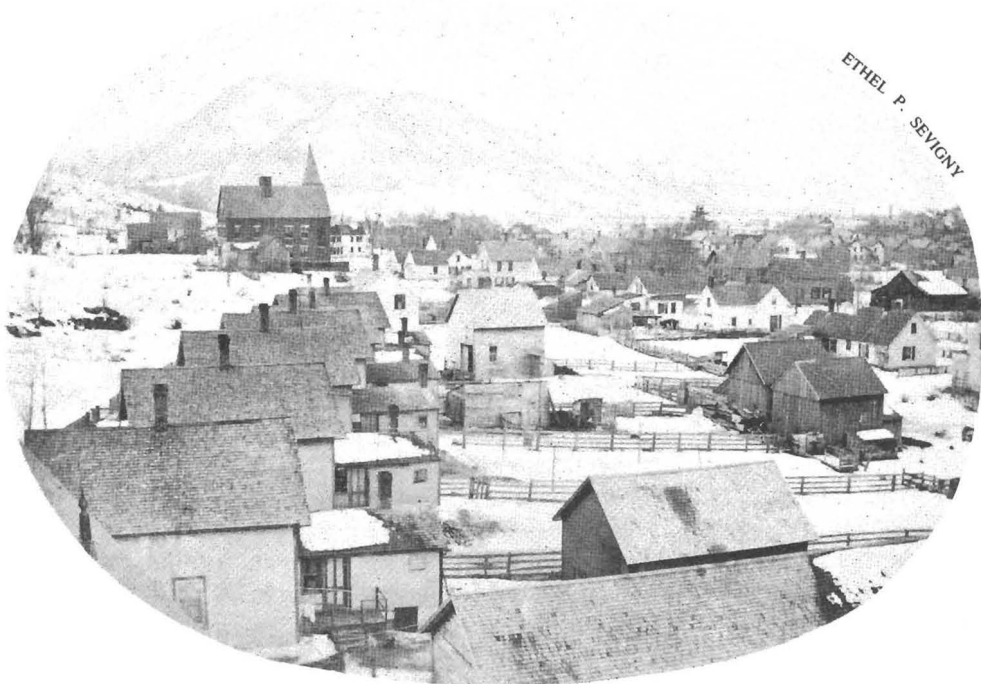
The novelty of the nurse's uniform, and her bicycle, caused considerable interest. Many of the people had never seen a woman ride a wheel. You may be assured that the nurse had a most interesting and absorbing work among the green hills of Proctor and also many amusing experiences. In teaching our habits for healthy living, she learned much of the customs and methods of treatment of the native countries of her people. Both patient and nurse developed a most efficient sign language and a smattering of each other's native tongue. It was in Proctor village that the "district nurse" first became acquainted with "a babe in swaddling clothes" and learned that the object of this bandaging was "to make da baby's legs go straight."

On one of her calls, the nurse found a little woman who did not seem "just right in her mind" and the neighbors were worried about it. It seems this woman had been a dancer in one of Europe's Royal Theatres and had married a musician from the same place. They had come to this country with visions of a roseate future, but the strain of drudgery and childbearing was too much for a "Butterfly" and the young wife had become a drug addict. It was pathetic to see this little woman, dressed in a gauze ballet costume, trying to perform the duties of a housewife.

As the teacher of one of the village schools was a personal friend, the nurse occasionally stopped to see her and visit the school. Sometimes she had a chance to give first aid, as when a little lad cut his finger sharpening a pencil with a jack-knife. Once she found a child with a broken bone and the doctor had to be called. At this time the doctor's office was used for a dispensary and first aid room. One day, much to her surprise, this teacher asked her to "make some remarks"; so the nurse talked to the children on the first subject which came to mind—simple facts of health and right living. The children gave her such undivided attention that it was an inspiration to the speaker. So long ago, health talks were quite a novelty in a country school room; and this one soon became Front Page News in the little village. Mr. Proctor, hearing of it, thought it would be a good idea to make a practice of giving these talks to the pupils of the several schools in town. So it was arranged to have a little talk on hygiene and first aid given in one of the schools each week. This was probably the beginning of "School nursing" in this part of Vermont.

The work in Proctor grew to such an extent that the Vermont Marble Company decided to employ a nurse in West Rutland and Center Rutland where some of their quarries and mills were located. Later in the same year (1895) Miss Harriet W. Stewart, a sister of the Proctor Nurse, was engaged to do the "district nursing" in these communities. These two sisters, graduates of the Waltham School, were the first industrial nurses. This service was not limited to employees of the company, although supported by that organization, but other residents, through the family physician, were at liberty to call on the nurse for help.

The success of the visiting nurse service influenced the Vermont Marble Company to undertake the large enterprise of providing a hospital for the employees and other residents of the community. The public health work has been carried on in connection with the hospital ever since. The hospital was intended primarily for the benefit of the company's employees and their families, but others, and especially residents of the communities where the different branches of the business were located, could be admitted as pay patients. It was the company's desire that the people of these communities should be interested as generally as possible in the conduct and success of the hospital. Accordingly, its management was given over to a representative board of local people who had places on all committees. The residents have always done everything in their power to help in the success of this institution. The Vermont Marble Company has from its early days shown a generous interest in the communities where its plants were located and co-operated with them in any project for the public good with both moral and financial support.



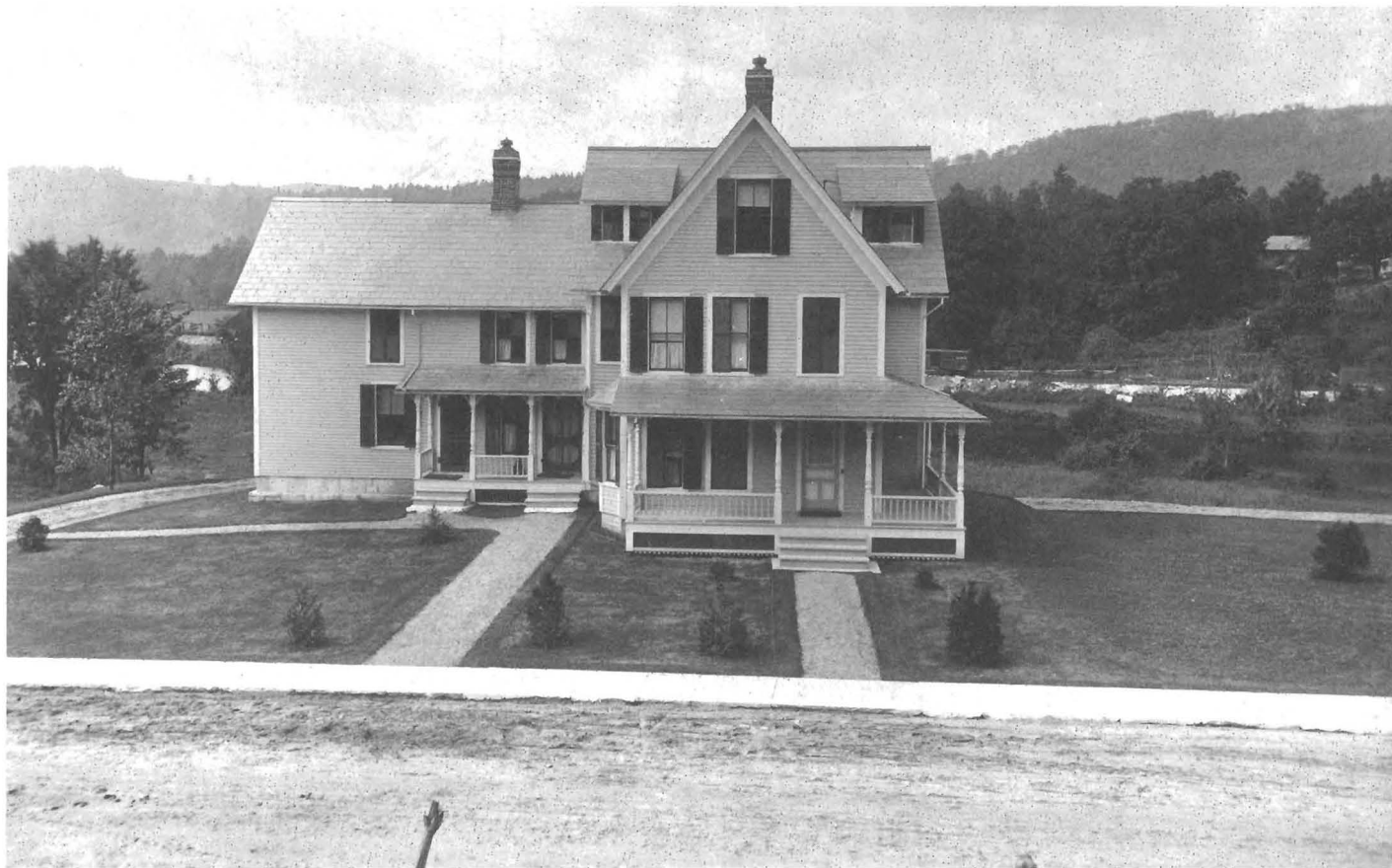
High Street, West Rutland, showing "Company" houses in foreground and the old high school in the distance.



Looking east on Route 4, Center Rutland. Near right is the Vermont Marble Company store, the building with the cupola is the old school. These buildings burned in 1907 and 1908, respectively. Evergreen Cemetery is at left.

The Proctor Hospital was opened on August 6, 1896, with Miss Ada M. Stewart as its first matron. The hospital itself was a rebuilt private house and was as well equipped materially as it was possible, in those days, to make it. There was a wonderful operating room, finished in Vermont Marble, with every convenience which could be obtained at the time. On the day the hospital opened, five typhoid cases were admitted, two of whom could speak no English, and all of them more or less delirious. These were hectic days—and nights. The matron and her one assistant, Miss Katharine Field, a graduate of the Elliott Hospital at Keene (N.H.), cared for the patients as best they could. These two constituted the entire nursing staff—and the visiting nursing must also be carried on.

The Board of Management of the Proctor Hospital consisted of a group of practical people, business and professional men and busy homemakers. Although the organization of a hospital was new to them, they soon realized that however complete hospital building and material equipment might be, all this was of little avail without a sufficient staff of competent nurses. The crying need was for nursing care and this was provided as the need was appreciated.



Proctor's first hospital opened in August 1896 on the west side of South Street. The building was utilized as the Proctor Inn when the second hospital was built on Ormsbee Avenue. It was later razed.

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REGULATIONS

PATIENTS.

I. No patient shall be admitted to the hospital except upon certificate of some member of the medical staff approved by at least one member of the Committee on Hospital service.

II. In cases of accident or other emergency, the matron may admit a patient without certificate and report the admission and reasons at once to the Committee on Hospital Service.

III. No person suffering from Small Pox, Diphtheria, Scarlet Fever or Delirium Tremens shall be admitted, unless some surgical operation shall be required.

IV. No person who is suffering from a chronic or incurable disease shall be admitted, unless there are urgent symptoms, which, in the opinion of the certifying physician, can be relieved.

V. The Committee on Hospital Service shall determine whether a patient shall be a free or a pay patient, and if a pay patient, shall fix the rate of board, but at not to exceed \$4.00 per week.

VI. No person shall bring, or cause to be brought into the hospital for the use of a patient any article of food without the consent of the matron, nor shall the use of tobacco, wine or intoxicating liquor be allowed, excepting under the direction of the physician in charge.

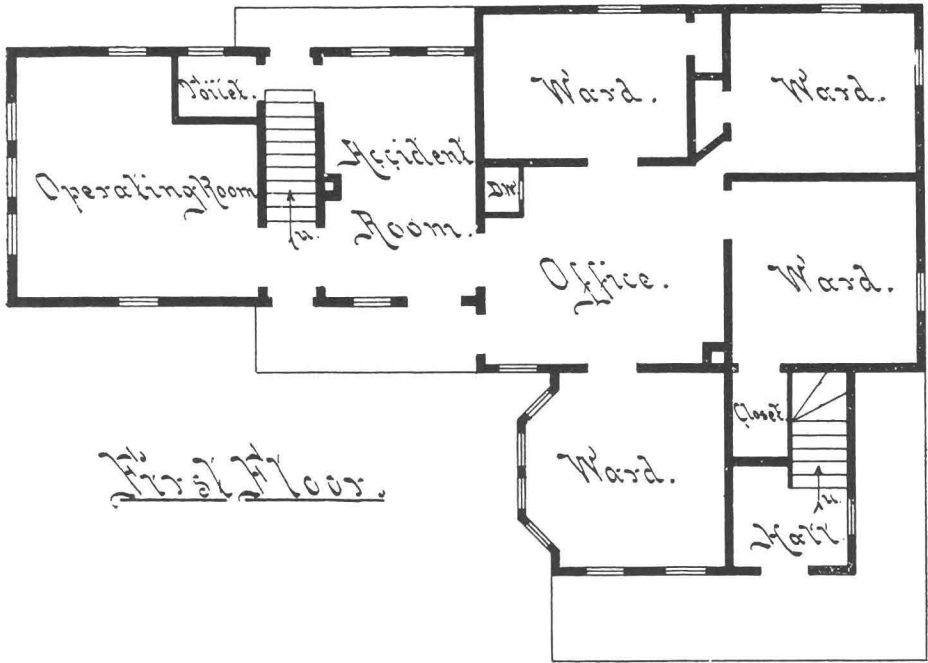
VII. All patients shall have the privilege of receiving visits from their friends when permitted to do so by the physician in charge or the matron, subject to such restrictions as shall be deemed necessary or proper.

VIII. The matron, if the discipline of the hospital shall require it, may, with the approval of the Committee on Hospital Service, discharge a patient for misconduct.

IX. Visitors to patients will be admitted on Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday afternoons from two to three o'clock; and on Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings from seven to eight o'clock. No patient will be allowed to see more than two visitors on the same day.



The Proctor Hospital Floor Plans



Material on pages 75-78 is reproduced from "By-Laws and Regulations of the Proctor Hospital", 1897.

The nurse of today would find it hard to imagine the things with which the first "district nurses" had to contend. In the small towns and villages telephones in private homes were not common. If a physician was needed, usually someone must go after him, and when he wished to have the nurse's help he sent his "horse and buggy" after her. In Proctor Village the frame houses all had slate roofs and cisterns built of blocks of marble. They used rain water from these slate roofs which was filtered into the marble cisterns. It was good tasting water but it had to be pumped from the cistern by hand. Some houses had wells and a few had running water. Kerosene lamps were used to light the first surgical operations which were usually done on the kitchen table, after the room had been made ready. This process took almost a day as every utensil, as well as walls, ceiling and floor had to be thoroughly cleaned and washed with an antiseptic. Usually bowls and pitchers had to be borrowed from the neighbors, who gave their friendly help in these preparations. The towels and dressings were steamed in the wash boiler and baked in the oven of the kitchen stove.

By the old process of trial and error, the "Proctor District Nurse" went about her daily task of giving advice and comfort, bathing new babies, caring for the mothers, helping in emergencies, dressing wounds and teaching ways of health and good habits (in seven languages), as well as she knew. She did not know that she was an "Industrial Nurse" nor did she dream that these and other small beginnings would grow to the splendid work that the modern Public Health Nurses are doing in the world. Probably few Public Health Nurses of today, with the advantage of their special education and the strength of their organization, realize that their success owes something to these small beginnings.

Biographical Notes

Ada Mayo and Harriet Wyman Stewart were the daughters of Chaplain William H. Stewart, U.S.N., and his wife, Roline Mayo.

Ada was a strong choice by Fletcher Proctor for she was familiar with Vermont. Although born 2 December 1870 in Braintree MA, she had attended Vermont Academy at Saxton's River. She was graduated from there in 1889.

She was well-grounded in the classics and her Waltham Training School field experience provided an excellent background for the tasks she would face in Proctor.

Following her service at Proctor and West Rutland, Ada Stewart became a surgical nurse for Drs. Field and Durringer in Fort Worth TX. In 1900 she returned to Rutland as Assistant Superintendent of the Rutland Hospital but left soon for Troy NY. She studied massage with Dr. Douglas Graham of Boston and then returned to Troy where she practiced and taught this skill at Samaritan Hospital Training School. Her career also took her to Seattle WA, St. Augustine FL, and Lake Placid NY.

In 1918 she married Henry J. Markolf, a retired businessman, and lived in West Rutland. Little is known of her subsequent activities. She died in the Eastern Star Nursing Home in Randolph, 26 April 1945, at the age of nearly 75.

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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ISSN 0748-2493

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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